

Hello – My name is Dr. Norma Kirwan, Director of The Dorothy Bennett Behavioral Health Center with Optimus Health Care in Stamford. I want to thank our Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Lud Spinelli, for inviting me to speak today, and to all of you for your attention.

Optimus Health Care is the largest provider of primary health care services in Southwestern Connecticut. Our behavioral health center has been funded in part by the Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services (“DMHAS”) for over 20 years, and that funding is critical to our continued operations. The DMHAS funding constitutes about 50% - \$637,000 – of our \$1.3 million dollar operating budget. Without this funding we would not be able to serve the nearly 1,000 patients in our clinic, most of whom cannot find treatment elsewhere.

Our patients often have complex medical and psychological problems that require a team approach and integration with a range of other services. Optimus Health Care is uniquely positioned to provide this support. We offer medical and dental services, behavioral health and vocational services, and lab facilities under one roof. We do not just focus on symptom reduction, but rather we take a holistic approach in treating the individual, helping them to learn skills to improve their quality of life.

Since the closing of the state hospitals over the last few decades, community programs such as ours have become increasingly necessary to support these individuals, reduce costs and prevent emergency room and inpatient gridlock. In our Center alone, we have tripled the number of people we serve from levels of twenty years ago, while operating with more than a 25% reduction in staff. There is no more room for reductions. Our

system is efficient, cost-effective, and sensible, and most importantly, provides quality, personal care for many people.

And that is why I'm here today -- to encourage you to reconsider the proposal to eliminate funding for the hospitals and behavioral health centers that provide these essential services. In dollar amounts the funding is relatively small, but it can make an enormous difference not only in providing treatment, but also in preventing secondary, burdensome costs to our communities and our healthcare system at large. Thank you.

